

Message Text

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EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHLAUDEMANN FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UY
SUBJECT: PROBABLE DEPARTURE OF FOREIGN MINISTER BLANCO

REFS: MONTEVIDEO 3130, MONTEVIDEO 4623

1. IN REFTELS WE DISCUSSED THE PROBABILITY OF THE RESIGNATION OF FONMIN BLANCO UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN HIS ASSIGNMENT TO SOME OTHER IMPORTANT DIPLOMATIC MISSION. THERE ARE NOW A NUMBER OF OTHER INDICATIONS THAT HIS DEPARTURE IS IMMINENT, BUT UNDER SOMEWHAT OTHER CONDITIONS.

2. ALTHOUGH I HAD BLANCO AT MY HOME AT THANKSGIVING DINNER AFTER HIS RETURN FROM AROUND-THE-WORLD TOUR, I WAS INFORMED YESTERDAY BY PROTOCOL, IN RESPONSE TO MY REQUEST TO SEE HIM, THAT HE WAS NOT RECEIVING ANYONE FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR. LATER ON, I SAW HIM AT OFFICIAL FUNCTION WHERE HE APOLOGIZED FOR THE RESPONSE WHICH HAD BEEN GIVEN BUT SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE ME PRIVATELY LATER IN HIS OFFICE. AS I OBSERVED HIM AT THIS FUNCTION, ATTENDED

ALSO BY THE PRESIDENT AND HIGH MILITARY FIGURES, HE SEEMED TO ME TO BE VERY MUCH NOT HIMSELF. HE WAS CLEARLY DISTRACTED AND UNCOMFORTABLE. OTHER AMBASSADORS NOTED THE SAME DEMEANOR.

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3. TODAY AT A RECEPTION, A HIGH FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL TOLD ME THAT BLANCO WOULD BE LEAVING PROMPTLY AFTER THE FIRST OF THE YEAR AND THAT HE WAS STAYING ON ONLY IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS GREETING TO THE PRESIDENT AT YEAR'S END. AT THE SAME FUNCTION, THE ARGENTINE AMBASSADOR, WHO IS AN OLD CLOSE FRIEND OF MINE AND VERY WELL CONNECTED HERE, CONFIRMED TO ME THAT BLANCO

WAS THOROUGH. BUT HE ADDED THAT BLANCO'S HOPES TO HAVE SOME IMPORTANT DIPLOMATIC MISSION, PERHAPS THE UN OR WASHINGTON, HAD BEEN DASHED AS HE WAS NOT GOING TO BE OFFERED ANYTHING. THE ARGENTINE SEEMED UPSET AND UNHAPPY OVER THIS NEWS AND ASKED IF I HAD ANY INFORMATION AS TO WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO PRODUCE SUCH A RIFT.

4. IF BLANCO LEAVES, AS NOW APPEARS TO BE PROBABLE, IT WILL BE JUST ANOTHER STEP IN WHAT I HAVE VIEWED HERE AS A DETERIORATION IN THE QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT BEGINNING WITH THE OUSTER OF BORDABERRY LAST JUNE. WE HAVE REPORTED THE LACK OF ACCOMPLISHMENT DURING THE INTERREGNUM OF DEMICHELI AND THE UNPOPULARITY OF APARICIO MENDEZ WHICH BECAME VERY CLEAR EVEN BEFORE HIS INAUGURATION IN LATE AUGUST. WE HAVE ALSO REPORTED THE RESTIVENESS OR DEPARTURE OF SUCH PRESTIGIOUS CIVILIAN OFFICIALS AS FORMER MINISTER OF ECONOMY VEGH VILLEGAS, THE MAYOR OF MONTEVIDEO OSCAR RACHETTI, AND MOST RECENTLY THE RESPECTED MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AZNAREZ. MENDEZ APPEARS TO BE NO MORE THAN A RATHER PATHETIC FIGUREHEAD AND THE MILITARY ARE ASSUMING EVERMORE THE CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT AND EXERCISING IT WITH TYPICAL INFLEXIBILITY. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY DOMINANT FIGURE, DECISIONS ARE MADE, AS WE HAVE REPORTED, BY A COMMITTEE OF GENERALS AND NOBODY APPEARS WILLING TO STICK HIS NECK OUT AND BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYTHING. THE DEPARTURE OF BLANCO, WHICH APPEARS IMMINENT, WILL BE ANOTHER STEP IN THE DILUTION OF SUCH PRESTIGE AS THE GOVERNMENT HAD.

5. I BELIEVE THAT CONCERN FOR THE LACK OF DIRECTION HERE IS BEING OBSERVED BY MANY, INCLUDING SOME OF MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES, AND MAY EVEN BE NURTURING THE HOPE AMONG SOME URUGUAYANS THAT SOMEONE IN THE MILITARY (PERHAPS GENERAL ALVAREZ) TAKE CHARGE TO
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PROVIDE THE LEADERSHIP THAT IS OBVIOUSLY LACKING.

6. I AM GOING A LITTLE FURTHER IN THIS MESSAGE THAN I ORIGINALLY INTENDED WHICH WAS SIMPLY TO ALERT YOU TO THE PROBLEM OF BLANCO'S DEPARTURE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE HAD ORIGINALLY SUPPOSED. WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION OF THE GOVERNMENT HERE SIX MONTHS AFTER THE OUSTER OF BORDABERRY AND SHALL BE SENDING THIS ON THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS.
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